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Converting Online Visitors Into Clients

Unlike local newspaper ads which start the phones ringing right away, the Internet is broad-based and appeals to buyers who may be months or years from buying, to the frustration of many real estate professionals. That's caused many agents to dismiss Internet leads as unimportant.

But what is one agent's annoyance is another's goldmine. Some agents report that staying in contact with long-shot leads pays off using Internet tools such as [Market Conditions Reports™](#), contact management drip campaigns, [The Real Estate Update](#) newsletter, and more.

Susan Youngblood, REALTOR®, ABR, CRS, GRI, Broker Associate, RE/MAX Heart of Texas Realtors, Austin, Texas, Web site by [Advanced Access](#)

Until recently, getting found on the Internet was a matter of buying a Web site and search engine placement, putting listings on the Internet and hoping for the best. But [Susan Youngblood](#) has found a way to get more leads and visitors to her Web site by posting her opinion of the market on Market Conditions Report™.

The next day after posting her first "report" online, she had an inquiry from a buyer/investor who lives in California. He found her report on [MSN HomeAdvisor](#), and told her he liked what she had written and appreciated that she e-mailed him back right away. Because she took him seriously, he is on his way to Austin to look at condominium investments this week.

Does Youngblood have any doubts that he's the real thing? "He has his financing in order, and he gave me his cell phone number," she says. "He has three other investment properties here and had been working with an agent who didn't respond to his e-mails. He didn't like that. We did everything by e-mail!"

A graduate from the University of Texas, Youngblood's client thought he wanted to invest in properties near the school, but Youngblood's knowledge of the market impressed him to consider another idea.

"We are having mold issues with older places, and he could sidestep that with new construction, and he would not have the maintenance problems," Youngblood advised. "And he would be leasing to a different age group than college kids. I'm excited about a new condo project here that is very well done, and where he could get in before the prices go up."

When Youngblood finds articles of interest to her new client, she e-mails him. "With most people, it is their home, but by having those same feelings about his investments, I can make him feel more comfortable taking my advice on some issues, while he crunches the numbers to make it work."

Bart Zimmer, REALTOR(r), Coldwell Banker Dan Blough and Associates, Santa Maria, California, Web site by [Best Image Marketing](#)

Agent Bart Zimmer, says, "I treat e-mail like a telephone call. You have to respond as quickly as possible."

Explains Zimmer, most agents won't bother with an e-mail from a buyer who is playing hard to get by failing to give a phone number and address and specific information about their needs.

"They give you a taste, and see if you respond," says Zimmer. "A lot of Realtors don't respond, so if they e-mail 20 people, and I'm the only one to respond, I will get the relationship."

"When I get an e-mail with no contact information, I consider them a cold lead, but I e-mail them and tell them that I have information to give them, and that I need the phone number and address. Odds are 80 percent that I will get it because they realize there is a live person on the other end," he says.

Zimmer divides prospects into hot, warm and cold leads and color-codes them red, white and blue. "Red will buy in the next 30 days, warm is three to six months away, and cold is nine months or longer."

He then puts them into a different automated follow-up program depending on their colors.

"The average Internet buyer takes six to 12 months. I rarely have one who contacts me and says 'I'm ready to buy right now,'" says Zimmer. "I put them on a Top Producer e-mailing list with programmed letters. You'll get a letter from me once a month if you are buying in less than a year. When it gets to two or three months, I e-mail them every two to three weeks."

Zimmer also turns cold leads into cash. "The biggest key is keeping in contact with regardless of how long that they plan to move," advises Zimmer. "I will e-mail them, if you aren't planning to move, let me know. And some people will e-mail me that they've chosen another area. That gives me an in for a referral."

"I had an Internet client from Idaho, and it took them a year and 8 months to buy a home here, but when they got here, we felt like we already knew each other. One year later, they wanted to sell, take the money and run, and they moved back to Idaho. They just called me wanting me to find her a Realtor in Idaho," says Zimmer. "The key is you treat them with respect and give them the service they need. Most Realtors would take a client like that out of their database, but I think of people as clients for life."

Zimmer also says that he gets enough leads from his Web site to offer referrals to other agents, but he's careful not to give prospects to agents who don't believe in long-term follow-up.

"We had the area of Santa Barbara locked up, and we didn't work it," says Zimmer. "We found a go-getter Realtor and sent him three to five leads a day. When we weren't getting any referral fees, I called him, and he said, 'They were all duds. They are a year away, so I threw them out.' He didn't realize what he had done. The Internet customer will call the person who will stay in touch."

Christine Pardo, REALTOR®, e-PRO, Kroll Realty, Plantation, Florida, Web site custom designed

"It's extremely low cost to hang onto Internet leads," says agent Christine Pardo, "it's two clicks a day, but you can only e-mail 'Can I get you more information?' so many times."

She relies instead on The Real Estate Update, Realty Times' online customizable newsletter to help

with new and long-term prospects.

"The newsletter is a look at what the market's doing," explains Pardo. "It is a gentle non-intrusive way of staying in touch."

To Realtor complaints that Internet customers aren't real buyers, Pardo says, "A lot do buy and sell; your percentages are no worse than sign calls. The idea is that a husband says we need to move to Florida, they go online and start searching, their dream comes true, and I'm the only one that e-mails them, and now they know me."

Pardo's system for staying in touch goes as follows:

1. I have several opportunities for them to contact me. Of course the e-mail link is on every page - but also relo packages, magazine ads, foreclosures, daily home finders, etc . Some ask for lots of information, some very little for the shy visitors.
2. I respond to their request as soon as humanly possible. I prefer individual responses with preformatted information inserted. It's faster and less typing for me, and more personalized than an auto responder. For some requests (relo packages especially) I call them as soon as possible.
3. Then I put them on a Top Producer trickle system with e-mails and occasional phone calls following up. I write all the letters because I want them to appear more personalized.
4. Everyone who contacts me gets put on my newsletter list. These receive monthly newsletters and announcements of my new listings.
5. If I get no feedback after 3-6 months (depending on their original request) they are dropped from everything but the newsletter.

Are you dismissing leads because they came from the Internet? It could be that you don't have an array of contact and follow-up tools, or you prefer to do business with act-now customers only. But you'll need customers next month and next year. Why not use the low-cost Internet tools that are available to nurture these long-term leads until they are ready to buy? One thing is certain, if you don't, other agents will be happy to.

Written by Blanche Evans

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